



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES
November 14, 2011
5:00 P.M.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

S. Marmarou, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, F. Acosta, D. Sterner, D. Reed, J. Waltman

OTHERS PRESENT:

L. Kelleher, S. Katzenmoyer, C. Younger, C. Geffken, R. Natale, C. Zale

Mr. Waltman called the Committee of the Whole meeting to order at 5:07 p.m.

I. 2012 Budget Update

Mr. Geffken distributed updated copies of the 2012 budget revenues and expenses along with an updated Full Time Position Ordinance. He reviewed the adjustments.

Mr. Waltman questioned the healthcare contribution as this line item is decreased in all departments. Mr. Geffken thanked the staff of the Accounting and Human Resources offices for their work on this line item. The initial calculations were refined and the expense could be decreased.

Mr. Marmarou stated that non-profit organizations do not contribute to services through taxes. He stated that Olivet Boys and Girls Club will be receiving \$53,000 in the CDBG budget and questioned why. Mr. Geffken stated that the City has a long standing relationship with Olivet and that they produce many successful programs.

Mr. Marmarou expressed the belief that this funding should be used for City projects. He questioned the increase in positions in the Property Maintenance office.

Mr. McMahon arrived at this time.

Mr. Geffken stated that this increase is to allow Property Maintenance to begin working on initiatives in the Housing Strategy including the Certificate of Transfer program and more frequent rental inspections. He also stated that the contribution to Olivet has been decreasing and that City programs are financed before awarding funding to outside agencies.

Mr. Marmarou again stated that the City is in poor financial condition and non-profits do not pay property taxes and yet they receive funding.

Mr. Acosta stated that the City is funding \$500,000 toward the African American Museum project through its Capital budget.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the majority of the non-profit properties in the City belong to the Reading School District and churches. She stated that these facilities provide many services to residents and requested that these entities be viewed by the beneficial outcome of their services.

Mr. Wright arrived at this time.

Mr. Acosta questioned the removal of two clerks in Human Resources. Mr. Geffken stated that these are the payroll clerks and the positions are moving into Accounting.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned the function of the police personnel that were reinstated into the budget. Mr. Geffken stated that the forensics unit has been restored.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for additional regional cooperation. She requested that discussions continue to share services. Mr. Geffken stated that discussions are ongoing and some attitudes toward regionalization are changing.

Mr. Acosta questioned how many positions were currently vacant. Mr. Geffken stated that he did not have that information but would provide it to Council.

Mr. Sterner questioned the decrease of 51 employees. Mr. Geffken explained that many are those who were transferred to the Water Authority.

Mr. Sterner stated that he was bothered that employees are decreasing but costs are increasing. Mr. Zale attributed this to increased pension obligations, pay increases and benefit costs.

Ms. Reed suggested that the City's Planning office be considered as a regionalization option as many functions overlap the County Planning Office. Mr. Geffken stated that he has not yet explored this option.

Ms. Reed suggested that this would be a large benefit to the City and suggested exploring this possibility.

II. Quality of Life Ticketing Ordinance Amendment

Mr. Geffken stated that the trash in alleyways has been removed from this version.

Mr. Natale stated that the City is meeting with haulers to discuss temporary dumpsters. He stated that roll off dumpsters do not have covers and noted his concern that haulers will no longer bring them into the City if they are required to be covered. He explained that they are covered during transport by the truck but that on site covers are not available.

Mr. Waltman suggested tabling this item until after the meeting with the haulers occurs. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she will make that motion.

Mr. Geffken stated that Mr. Natale, Ms. Butler, and Ms. Kelleher continue to work on this amendment.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that dumping in alleys is illegal and questioned whether this should be handled as a crime issue or quality of life issue. Mr. Natale explained that if residents call Property Maintenance or the Citizens Service Center to report the dumping before a ticket is issued a ticket will not be issued until the resident has been given time to remove the items. If a ticket has already been issued, it will be waived. He stated that the inspectors are very cooperative and assist residents with removal of dumped items as they are able.

Ms. Reed questioned the grace period for residents who call to report the dumping if the items are not removed. Mr. Natale stated that policy is to wait two weekends to allow time to have the items removed while considering work schedules and weather.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that placement of temporary dumpsters near intersections can be problematic. She stated that many streets are narrow and that line of sight issues are created. Mr. Natale stated that haulers are cooperative in placement and will make adjustments if complaints are received.

Mr. Waltman questioned the cost of a permit. Ms. Kelleher stated that temporary dumpster permits are \$5 per day while permanent dumpster permits are \$250 annually.

III. CDBG Action Plan

Mr. Geffken reviewed the Action Plan.

Mr. Wright explained that the Plan is due to HUD tomorrow. He stated that amendments can be made at a later date as projects come forward and as unprogrammed funds are located.

Mr. Acosta questioned if the agreement with Habitat for Humanity has changed based on discussions regarding blighted property rehabilitations. Ms. Kelleher stated that this is a separate issue regarding the pending resolutions to reprogram funds. Mr. Geffken stated that the necessary meetings will be taking place on Friday.

Ms. Reed questioned the rationale of not funding Berks Women in Crisis. Mr. Geffken stated that the City has limited funds and is looking to make the largest impact.

Ms. Reed noted her understanding of the limited funds but stated that Berks Women in Crisis does good work and funds should be more evenly distributed.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the good done by organizations is difficult to quantify. She suggested that funding be viewed as an investment and suggested further discussion.

Mr. Wright explained that the capacity of the organization also impacts funding.

Ms. Reed stated that funding of organizations with religious affiliations can be tricky. She stated that funding must be available for all who are in need, not only to those who belong to a select group. She questioned if this violated the separation of church and state.

Mr. Waltman stated that in the past the City did not include or discount organizations based on religious affiliation. He stated that amending the Action Plan at this point would be dangerous and advised Council not to suggest amendments at this time but to keep projects in mind when unprogrammed funds are available.

Mr. Acosta stated that funding the African American Museum sets a precedent for all other ethnicities who pursue similar projects. He noted his support of the Museum but questioned if the City would be able to fund all similar projects. Mr. McMahon stated that City funding is contingent on the fundraising capabilities of the organization. He stated that the City funding is for acquisition and demolition costs.

Mr. Waltman stated that most funding is used by organizations to leverage additional private funding. He stated that it is a small amount compared to the total cost of the project. He stated that most organizations also invest sweat equity and perform major fundraising campaigns and noted the difficulty raising capital in the current economy.

Ms. Reed questioned if the Our City Reading funding would be used in the Ricktown area only or City-wide. Mr. Wright stated that it would be City-wide with a focus in Ricktown.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that Ricktown is the only neighborhood that is noted which gives the perception that it is the only neighborhood which will receive attention. She stated that language can be placed in contracts with organizations with religious affiliations that funds are for the use of all in need.

Mr. Waltman stated that the Action Plan is before Council for vote this evening. Mr. Geffken reminded Council that adjustments can be made at a later date and additional projects can be funded through unprogrammed funds.

Mr. Waltman stated that contracts for projects should have trigger dates included to ensure that projects are moving forward. Mr. Wright stated that dates are included in all contracts.

Mr. Schlegel, a member of the Library Board, was granted permission to ask a question.

Mr. Schlegel questioned when Council would receive the resolution to reprogram funds for library improvements. Mr. Geffken stated that he must first meet with Mr. Nemeth to determine the available amount. He stated that unprogrammed fund review begins in February.

Mr. Marmarou questioned the PILOT program. Mr. McMahon stated that talks with Alvernia are moving forward regarding the maintenance of Angelica. He stated that RACC is interested in an intern program. He stated that he has been speaking with other municipalities regarding Reading Hospital and the need for the municipalities to work together regarding the hospital's tax exempt status. He stated that there has been no progress with Albright. He will be reaching out to churches for contributions as they are able.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if funds received could be set aside for CDBG projects. Mr. McMahon stated that most contributions will be in services, not funds. Mr. Geffken explained that it would depend on the amount received and the eligible projects.

IV. Agenda Review

The ordinance amending the Recovery Plan will be withdrawn from the agenda.

Council reviewed this evening's agenda including the following:

- Award of Contracts for the 42 inch force main projects

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned the use of local labor for these projects. Mr. Geffken stated that local labor will be utilized as able.

- Resolution adopting the Housing Strategy

Mr. Waltman questioned if the performance measurement requirements were added. Ms. Kelleher stated that they were.

V. Executive Session

Mr. Waltman announced the need for an executive session in accordance with the Sunshine Act Section 708 Executive Sessions (a) Purpose number five (5) which states “To review and discuss agency business which, if conducted in public, would violate a lawful privilege or lead to the disclosure of information or confidentiality protected by law, including matters related to the initiation and conduct of investigations of possible or certain violations of the law and quasi-judicial deliberations.”

Council entered executive session at 6:17 pm and exited at 6:30 pm.

VI. Housing Strategy

Mr. Jones and Mr. Kromer arrived at this time.

Mr. Kromer stated that he has added the performance measures to the strategy and that the City work group should remain in tact to track progress. He stated that metrics will be established as necessary.

Mr. Waltman stated that the metrics will assist the work group and not simply as a means to report back to Council. He noted the need for this process to move forward. Mr. Kromer agreed.

Mr. Waltman stated that Council will see the results of this work as they travel throughout the City.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that this process is people-driven. She noted that people’s behaviors must change. She stated that if the behaviors do not change, the City will never see improvement of its housing stock. She also expressed the belief that assumptions are made that renters are not good residents. She stated that personalities are more important than tenant status.

Mr. Marmarou disagreed regarding the behaviors of owners versus tenants.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for the City to acknowledge the good owners and encourage all owners to improve their properties. Mr. Kromer noted the need for all City agencies to speak with one voice regarding housing. He also noted the need for outreach to other agencies to assist as needed.

Mr. Waltman noted the need for accountability of all property owners regardless of whether they are owner occupied or rental properties. He noted the need for an executable process.

Mr. McMahon stated that a property condition analysis was done in one City neighborhood which showed that investment properties are in the poorest condition.

Ms. Reed noted the need for the City to work to retain its strong neighborhoods. She questioned if this issue was noted in the strategy. Mr. Kromer stated that it is.

Ms. Reed expressed hope that the City would follow through to support its strong neighborhoods. She stated that confidence needs to be shown to those who remain in these neighborhoods.

Mr. Marmarou described the recent meeting of those organizing a neighborhood group in Northmont. He stated that the neighborhood is changing and the residents want to preserve this neighborhood.

Mr. Waltman again stated that execution is key to this strategy. He noted that housing must remain a priority for the City. Mr. Kromer stated that the City is serious about its implementation. He stated that Eric Weiss continues to work with the Centre Park group and has begun tracking open cases through a database. He noted the need for a property survey City-wide.

The meeting adjourned at 6:55 pm.

Respectfully Submitted
Linda A. Kelleher, CMC, City Clerk